

To The Seven Churches

Laodicea



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Revelation 3:14-22

What does pride mean? Is it good or bad?

Of the seven letters to the churches, and the various sins that are openly discussed of the corporate church, it seems that none of them are as harsh as the letter to the church in Laodicea. The city of Laodicea was known for a few things that allowed them to be financially self-sufficient. First, the minerals that had built up around the area allowed them to become the center of ophthalmology, producing various eye salves which people came from all around to be treated. They also shared an abundance of fine wool to craft elegant clothing with as signs of their wealth and opulence. Finally, with their centralized location along major trade routes, Laodicea had an abundance of riches.

Likewise, the church profited from their surroundings, becoming supposedly "self-sufficient" in the process. Yet, for all of its riches, the water of that particular area was borderline undrinkable, causing people to often vomit. Thus, with a set of dual aqueducts, water traveled from two cities to be used in the town. The first city, Hieropolis, was known for their hot springs which acted as a medical mineral baths. Colosse, on the other hand, had a cold water spring that seemed to continually produce cool and refreshing water. However, by the time the water reached Laodicea, it too had become lukewarm and disgusting, gaining the reputation of being largely undrinkable.

While the previous letters to churches point out the issues where the church had ceased to be the church (or in two cases exhorts them to continue in the faith), it is the church in Laodicea that receives the harshest criticism. The church had become to enmeshed in their own wealth and prosperity causing them to descend into pride. Their actions and their faith displayed that they did not need anyone or anything, even God. Pride, ultimately the source of all sin, communicates that we know better than God. There is no need to trust or have faith in anything other than ourselves as pride denies our need for a Savior. A church

becomes useless when pride runs rampant as it ceases to communicate the foundational Gospel truth; we need a savior. Yet, for the church or community experiencing pride, we can take heart that Christ is just outside the door, gladly willing to come in if only we opened the door.

Nothing Without Jesus Christ

For all the riches of Laodicea, the words of Jesus Christ attacked them to their core. Jesus Christ exhorts them, despite their earthly wealth, to take up the purified riches of gold refined by spiritual fire. There are riches greater than money and only God is able to provide the pure riches that people crave. For all the fine clothing, Jesus counseled them to be clothed instead in righteousness. Rather than fine, flashy clothing, the Christian should clothe themselves in the provision that comes from God and God alone. Furthermore, the clothing that God gives will surpass even the greatest clothing they could produce. Finally, while the city produced the salve to aid the eyes of people, the salve that God provides will give perfect vision. Everything the church thought made them special and independent amounted to nothing in the face of true riches in Jesus Christ. The church is nothing without the presence of God who provides for our every need and lavishes his riches upon us.

Pride says we need nothing but ourselves. True faith and true Christianity relies on the person of God to provide for our needs and for our salvation. Everything we have is nothing compared with what Jesus Christ offers. Furthermore, for a church to be wrapped up in pride rejects the Gospel that says we are unable to be self-sufficient. We may have everything the world has to offer, but we will miss the presence of God unless we admit our total dependence on Jesus Christ. The church in Laodicea believed they had everything they needed, yet, as Jesus made it clear, they were "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." (Revelation 3:17, NIV) As he described them as neither hot nor cold, while they had a puffed up view of themselves, they provided no functional use to those around them as either the refreshing cool waters or the warm healing waters. They were lukewarm and disgusting. God desires the church be refreshing to the world around it and heal-

ing in its application. Furthermore, only God provides these from the wellspring of His eternal well.

Invited Discipline

People often quote verse 20 without the proper context. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Revelation 3:20, NIV) Often times, this is preached as God's calling to those who do not yet believe. While there is truth in application to the non-believer, the intended recipient of this letter is the church. For the church wrapped in pride, Jesus is standing outside the doors of the church asking to coming in. Whereas the enemy would break in, Jesus will come in when invited and share a meal together in intimate friendship. In ancient times, the culture viewed sharing a meal with a person as an intimate act between two parties. They got to know each other, formed relationship, and grew with one another. This is the relationship that Jesus wants with us, not only to be our Lord but to be in relationship with us as well. All it requires is a rejection of the pride that closed the door.

As Jesus is invited in, there is discipline and rebuke. Pride resists this process but the soul thrives during it. Discipline and rebuke confront our flaws face to face and require that we allow a greater power than our own to reform and correct us. For the church in Laodicea, in believing they had everything they needed, they shut the doors to the presence and influence of God in order to continue in the act of selfishness and irrelevance. During the final days, pride will have no place in the church. Yet, all hope is not lost for the church who shuts her doors and Jesus continues to pursue even the most obstinate of people. Discipline and rebuke should be hallmarks for the church that seeks to shine brighter than ever before. We need Jesus and we need to be rescued from our sin. Jesus is knocking and the church, if it is to survive, must open its door for the intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father, however painful this process may feel.

Discussion Questions

- What three things does God counsel the church in Laodicea to do? What do these things symbolize?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- What does the discipline of God look like? Do you enjoy the discipline and rebuke of God? Why or why not?
- What does it say about Jesus that He knocks on the door? Does this mean that He is not sovereign or is there another quality that is being displayed here?
- What promises are offered to those who believe? How does this define our relationship with Jesus Christ?
- Why is pride so dangerous for the Christian to have? How does the Gospel counter the effects of pride?
- Where do you need to allow Jesus Christ in to dine with you, disciple you, and rebuke you? How is there freedom in allowing God to have His way inside of our soul and be everything we need?